



"The Gowrie estates were forfeited; the King's debt of £80,000 disappeared; the family were placed under the ban of the law; their very name was declared abolished; and even the two younger brothers, two harmless boys, had to take refuge in flight from the King's seemingly insatiable vengeance."

Henderson ¹

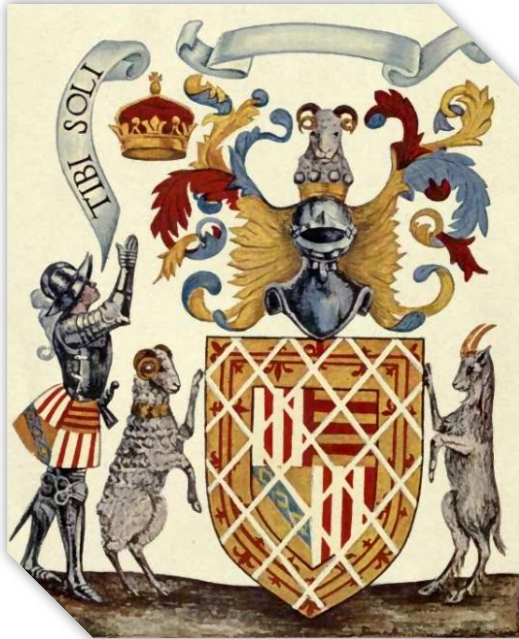
"King James was perhaps the most experienced Monarch in mysterious plots, and incomprehensible conspiracies that ever sat on a throne. He seemed at home in an examination of a suspected traitor; delighted in controversy; was an adept at an argument; was naturally timid and suspicious; had the good fortune to be served by some of the ablest of Ministers; and yet was ruled by the most profligate and weakest of favourites."

Cuthbert William Johnson ²

¹ Henderson, *James VI and I* (1904).

² Cuthbert W. Johnson, *The Life of Sir Edward Coke*, (1845).

Coat-of-Arms to John, third Earl of Gowrie
Source: Workman's *Manuscripts* Lyon's Office: Edinburgh



The shield displays, within the royal tressure, the Arms of Gowrie in the first and fourth, and those of Cameron and Halyburton in the second and third quarters. The supporters are “dexter” symbolized by a goat, and “sinister” symbolized by a ram; the crest is a ram’s head. The Gowrie motto: “Deid Schaw,” (Deeds Show) is missing, which can be seen in the original Coat-of-Arms below.

The above shield is blotted by transverse strokes of the pen, the whole design having been made for the purpose of being scored out after the death of John, the Earl of Gowrie, his trial and forfeiture, done posthumously, in 1600. On the left of the sinister supporter is an armed (“black-a-more”) man ³ in the Gowrie livery; his left hand grasps his sword hilt; his right is raised to an imperial crown, hanging above him in the air; from his lips issue the words: *Tibi Soli*, meaning, “For Thee Alone.”

³ A negro.



*Original Gowrie family Coat-of-Arms (1587) from the stone in Gowrie House, Perth
Source: Private collection of the Ruthven Family*

There is an interesting comment from Rev. James Scott (Minister of Perth) in regards to John, the of Earl Gowrie who is supposed to be “grandson of James IV and Queen Margaret, his mother being a daughter of Queen Margaret; a rival of James VI to the Crown of England since James was a great-grandson in the direct line.”⁴ To support his claim, in his *Life & Death of the Earl of Gowrie*,⁵ Rev. Scott fully transcribed -in George Mackenzie’s

⁴ Perth Literary & Antiquarian Society (1785).

⁵ Rev. James Scott, *Life & Death of the Earl of Gowrie* (Edinburgh: Balfour and Clarice, 1818).

publication- ⁶ an anonymous letter, which states Queen Elizabeth ordered all honours should be paid to John, the of Earl Gowrie, when he returned from France on May 20, 1600, “that were due to a Prince of Wales, and to her first cousin.” Whether the letter is original or a forgery is very hard to ascertain.

On April 3, 1600, John, the of Earl Gowrie was in London. ⁷ He was well received, and “a cabinet of plate,” is said to have been given to him by Elizabeth; what else passed we do not know. In May he returns to Scotland, and rode into Edinburgh among a cavalcade of his friends. According to Sir John Carey, writing to Cecil from Berwick on May 29th, King James of Scotland displayed jealousy of the arrival, “giving many jests and pretty taunts,” on the Earl’s reception by Elizabeth, and “marveling that the Ministers met him not.” ⁸

On June 22, 1609, nine years after Earl Gowrie was murdered in Perth, Ottavio Baldi wrote from Venice (where the Earl had studied) to James. The letter was forwarded by Sir Henry Wotton (Ambassador). Baldi writes about a venture he had, which started by a curious saying from Sir Robert Douglas: “He heard speech of a certain emblem or *impresa*,” left by John Earl Gowrie in Padua. This emblem referred to is the first image given at the beginning of this paper. Meeting a Scot there, Douglas asked where this emblem now was, and he was directed to the school of a teacher of dancing. Upon arriving, he found the emblem hung “among other devices and remembrances of his scholars.” Douglas had a copy of the emblem made and “acquainted me,” writes Baldi, “with the quality of the thing. We agreed together, that it should be fit, to obtain the very original itself, and to leave in the room thereof the copy that he had already taken, which he did effect by well handling the matter. Thus hath your Majesty now a view, in umbra, of those detestable thoughts which afterwards appeared *in facto*, according to the said Earl’s own mot[to]. For what other sense or allusion can the reaching at a crown with a sword in a stretched posture, and the impersonating of his device in a black-a-more yield to any intelligent and honest beholder?” ⁹

It is not clear, either by the emblem or by Rev. Scott’s alleged letter from Elizabeth, if John Earl Gowrie was indeed a Stuart bloodline to the English throne.

We studied the genealogy of the Gowrie-Ruthven family and give it briefly.

⁶ George Mackenzie (Earl of Cromarty), *An Historical Account of the Conspiracies of Gowrie, and Robert Logan of Restalrig, against King James VI*, (1713).

⁷ (a) Winwood, *Memorials*, p. 1,156; (b) Hudson to Cecil from the State Papers, Scotland (Elizabeth), Vol. lxvi. No. 19.

⁸ Border Calendar, Vol. II (May 29, 1600) Carey to Cecil.

⁹ State Papers, Venice, E.G., No. 14 (1608, 1610).

*Margaret Tudor (Queen Consort of Scotland)
Countess of Angus and Lady Methven
(1489-1541)*

Henry Stuart (1st Lord Methven) ¹⁰ was Master of the Scottish Artillery and was the last husband to Margaret Tudor, widow of James IV and sister of Henry VIII. We mention him first as he is vital to sniffing out if John Earl Gowrie was in line to the English throne in 1600 when he met his death.



Margaret Tudor was born on November 20, 1489. At the age of fourteen she was married in the Palace of Holyrood House (Edinburgh) to King James IV of Scotland ¹¹ on August 7, 1503. The marriage produced six children.

1. James (Duke of Rothesay) born at Holyrood Palace. ¹²
2. A stillborn daughter (no name) at Holyrood Palace. ¹³
3. Arthur (Duke of Rothesay) born at Holyrood Palace. ¹⁴
4. King James V at Linlithgow Palace. ¹⁵ He was the only child to reach adulthood, and was successor of his father.
5. A second stillborn daughter (no name) at Holyrood Palace. ¹⁶
6. Alexander (Duke of Ross) born at Stirling Castle. ¹⁷

Margaret Tudor's husband was later killed at the battle of Flowdon on September 9, 1513; but she did not continue a widow fully eleven months, for come August 4, 1514, at the age of twenty-four she married Archibald Douglas (Great Earl of Angus). ¹⁸ The marriage only produced one daughter which they called Margaret, ¹⁹ who married Matthew Stuart (4th Earl of Lennox) and was the mother of Henry Stuart (Lord Darnley) who was the second husband of Mary, Queen of Scots and father to King James.

¹⁰ (1528-1552).

¹¹ (1503-1513).

¹² (1507-1508).

¹³ (b.1508).

¹⁴ (1509-1510).

¹⁵ (1512-1542).

¹⁶ (b.1512).

¹⁷ (1514-1515).

¹⁸ (1489-1557).

¹⁹ (1515-1578).

In 1516, Margaret Tudor requested a divorce from Archibald Douglas. The pretense for a divorce was that her husband had been previously married to Margaret Stuart, a daughter of the Baron of Traquair and they had a daughter called Lady Jean Douglas, who was afterwards married to Patrick Lord Ruthven.

After this divorce, on March 3, 1528, Margaret Tudor marries Henry Stuart (1st Lord Methven). This third marriage would produce a daughter, Dorothea Stuart, who is suspected to be the mother of John Earl Gowrie; however, this daughter died in her infancy, and this is the known genealogy of Queen Tudor Margaret and her three marriages.

Now, according to Bishops Lessly and Hume, the Tudor Queen Margaret and her third husband Henry had a son; he is supposed to have been slain at Pinkie on September 10, 1547: "In that battle 8,000 Scots were slain, some of them of the prime nobility. Lord Fleming was slain. The following sons and heirs of noblemen, whom we call Masters also were slain: Master of Livingston; Master of Ogilvy; Master of Evandale; Master of Methven; Master of Ruthven; and, Master of Ross."²⁰ Their son is mentioned in Henry Stuart's patent of creation 1525, as uterine brother of the Royal donor James V.

When Margaret Tudor died, Henry remarried taking Janet Stuart as his bride who was daughter of the 2nd Earl of Athole²¹ and Lady Janet Campbell.²² Henry and Janet were parents to four children:

1. Henry Stuart (2nd Lord Methven)²³
2. Dorothea Stuart who married William Ruthven (1st Earl of Gowrie).
3. Joan Stuart who married Colin Campbell (6th Earl of Argyll).
4. Margaret Stuart²⁴ who married Andrew Stuart the eldest son of the 2nd Lord Ochiltree.

As we see, Dorothea was the second daughter to Henry and Janet; Henry and Margaret Tudor's daughter called Dorothea died in her infancy. Henry and Janet's Dorothea married William, the 4th Lord of Ruthven and 1st Earl of Gowrie, and it is him we will now follow.

²⁰ John Lessly (Bishop of Ross), *De Rebus gestis Scotorum*, Vol. I., 1578.

²¹ (1475-1522).

²² (d.1545).

²³ (d.1572).

²⁴ (d.1627).



William was engaged in the conspiracy against Riccio, a favourite of Mary, Queen of Scots. After Riccio's death, William fled to England. He made peace and returned to Scotland when he supported James the sixth of Scotland. He was one of those who waited on the Scottish Queen at Loch Leven and by threats got her signature to her abdication of the crown. He was present at the coronation of James, and was made Lord Treasurer of Scotland for life (June 24, 1571), and an Extraordinary Lord of Session on November 25, 1578.

He was then created Earl of Gowrie by James and patent on August 23, 1581, when the Earldom of Gowrie was erected out of the lands of the monks of Scone and limited to heirs male of his body, whom failing to the heirs male bearing the name and arms of Ruthven. This charter was ratified by Parliament, on November 29, 1581.

William was one of the chief instruments of preserving the crown on the head of James in his non-age, against a powerful party who sought to deprive him of it, and this was no uncommon circumstance of responsibility to have been granted such devices to favoured persons. As time passed, William married Dorothea (second daughter to Henry and Janet) in Perth on August 17, 1561. The marriage bore the blessing of fourteen children.

Male issue

- (1) James, second Earl of Gowrie born in 1575 and died a youth at 1588.
- (2) John, third Earl of Gowrie born in 1578 and slain in 1600.
- (3) Alexander, Master of Gowrie was born in 1580 and was slain in 1600.
- (4) William Ruthven born in 1582. "William lived beyond seas, became a great chemist and being addicted to alchemy it was given out that he had found the Philosopher's Stone." ²⁵
- (5) Patrick Ruthven born in 1583.

²⁵ Chalderwood (Historian).

Female issue (only four registered)

- (1) Mary Ruthven born in 1562.
- (2) Isabella Ruthven.
- (3) Jean Ruthven.
- (4) Sophia Ruthven.
- (5) Margaret Ruthven.
- (6) Liliass Ruthven born in 1568.
- (7) Dorothea Ruthven born in 1570.
- (8) Katherine Ruthven born in 1571.
- (9) Beatrix Ruthven, who became a Court Lady of Queen Anne of Denmark.

The grandfather to all fourteen above children is indeed Henry Stuart (1st Lord Methven), and the grandmother is Janet (daughter of the 2nd Earl of Athole) and not Queen Margaret Tudor. This would make John Earl Gowrie a descendant from the Stuarts (Earls of Athole) with only a link to the royal family of Scotland.

As to the boys themselves, John was only eleven at his accession to Earldom; this will allow us to refer to him in this work as John Earl Gowrie. His education was committed to Robert Rollock (Principal of the College of Edinburgh) where John was brought up under this man's wing, "who dearly loved him because of his good behaviour, and the virtue which appeared in him." ²⁶ John's private tutor was William Rhind, a native of Perth and a cleric. While John was still a student at Edinburgh College, the Town Council of Perth elected him to be their Provost in the year 1592. His elder brother, his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, had all been in that same office. ²⁷

In the autumn of 1594, James left Scotland taking with him William Rhind as his tutor and travelling companion. They passed through France, delivering letters of recommendation to some learned men there. At Geneva they visited Theodore Bèza, the successor of Calvin, in the church of that city, and delivered to him letters from Robert Rollock, and some other of Bèza's correspondents in Scotland. They arrived in Padua November 1594, when John entered upon his new proposed course of study.

²⁶ Samuel Cowan, *Ruthven Family Papers* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd., 1912).

²⁷ Perth Town Records.

Back in Scotland, John's brother, Alexander Ruthven, became a gentleman of James's bed-chamber -unknown when- but was a favourite to Queen Anne of Denmark (James's Consort). For unspecific reasons, Alexander left James's Royal Court in May 1600, and was present with his brother John during the hunting season in Strabran in July of that year.

From documents of the King's treasury, we know that James owed John and Alexander a large sum, with accumulated interest, for expenses incurred by their father when Lord Treasurer of Scotland (1583-1584). James, in June 1600, gave John a year's respite from the pursuit of his father's creditors, hoping to pay him in the meanwhile. This is corroborated by a letter from George Nicolson, who was Elizabeth's envoy in Scotland. He wrote to Cecil on June 29, 1600, two months prior the murder of John and Alexander, in regards to a debt amounting to £80,000. ²⁸

George Nicolson to Sir Robert Cecil

(June 29, 1600) ²⁹

When it came to my Lord of Gowrie [John] he said he had been long out of the country and ignorant of the matter, yet accounted it all one and equivalent to the 100,000 crowns; or better that the King should have £40,000 and their like help for an army when time should serve, adding that it would be dishonourable to the King should he ask more than the country could give, and be denied; and most dishonourable to King and country that it should be supposed they could give him but little. At this the King was enraged, and seeing on Thursday it would be no better, he dismissed the Convention with thanks to the nobility, assuring and promising them his friendship and favour in all their actions, and threatening the Barons and Burghs that, as their advice lay in his way, he should remember them and be even with them. He would call a Parliament and displace them by vote of Parliament and Convention. He gave them a vote in both and made them a fourth estate which he should undo again.

* * *

²⁸ Henderson, *James VI and I*, 1904.

²⁹ (a) Frazer Tytler, *History*, Vol. IV; (b) Samuel Cowan, *Gowrie Conspiracy* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, Ltd., 1902).

James had enormous debts not only with the Gowrie-Ruthven family, which can be seen from the following extract of a letter written in 1614, from the correspondence of Chamberlain and Carleton:-

Correspondence between Chamberlain and Carleton
(February 16, 1614) ³⁰

Your neighbour (Bruckshaw) hath lain this month or five weeks in the Marshalsea, with six or seven of his companion brewers, for that they will not yield to have their drink taken to serve the King without money; for the King's brewer cannot get a groat of £16,000 that is owing to him for beer; so that he hath neither money nor credit to hold out any longer.

This term they attempted by law to remove themselves and to try their case; but they could not be relieved, for that there came a mandate from the King, whereby it is become a matter of state, and out of the compass of law. ³¹

The King cannot pay his brewers, and because they will not serve him without payment, when he is indebted to them £16,000, they are to be kept in prison without prospect of assistance from the law.

* * *

The place where John and Alexander were murdered was at Gowrie House; the area was extant in 1638, but destroyed to furnish a site for a gaol and county buildings in 1807. The most interesting areas of the estate had long been in ruins. Their murder has become a conspiracy deserving research. The apparent reason would be how "a young man," Panton the author states, "of amiable manners, and a conciliating disposition, the chief of an ancient, potent, and opulent family, and the favourite of his fellow citizens, slain, in his own house, by his guests; and these guests his Sovereign and Courtiers; his brother put to death at the same time with himself; the rest of his friends proscribed; such of his servants as evidenced any kind of fidelity towards him, hanged as traitors; his own dead body treated with every kind of ignominy; his name and race annihilated, and his property confiscated." ³²

³⁰ Thomas Birch, *The Court and Times of James the First*, Vol. I. (1848).

³¹ Birch: "A very creditable matter of state, certainly!"

³² William Panton, *The Gowry Conspiracy* (Perth: R. Morison, 1812).

It is a cruel punishment from fate, if not from King James himself, to the Gowrie-Ruthven family who were extensive landowners in Scotland, and identified very closely with the town of Perth since by marriage they were connected with various county families. Their country residence was Ruthven Castle in the neighbourhood of Perth; their town residence Gowrie House, and the head of the family was usually Sheriff and Provost of Perth.

In regards to the death of John and Alexander, and what happened on that fatal day of August 5, 1600, the government set down their theory of it and published it under the title: “A Discourse of the unnatural and vile conspiracy attempted by John, Earl of Gowry, and his brother, against his Majesty’s person, at St. Johnston, upon the 5th of August, 1600.” A Latin translation of the paper was published in 1601, entitled: *Ruvenorum Conjunctio*, meaning “The Conspiracy of the Ruthvens.” The author of the Latin paper is assumed to be Patrick Galloway (James’s Chaplain) as it exactly corresponds with the Sermon which Galloway delivered at the Cross of Edinburgh on August 11, 1600.³³

No narrative of the event from the Gowrie-Ruthvens or their friends has ever been published, very probably because no one was left who was in a position to do so. All were executed after the event by direct command of James. The official theory only comes from James’s account of what happened; we will add it into our work together with factual events, as we go on.

John and Alexander were in Strathbraan for fifteen days and returned to Perth on August 2, 1600; this is verified by George Craigenvelt (butler to the boys) who was with them at the time. There is evidence that letters passed from James to the young men while there, but these have been destroyed.

James resided at Falkland, especially during the hunting season. With him that day, about six in the morning of Tuesday, August 5, 1600, was the Earl of Marr, who had been custodian to James’s children since they were born. Another Earl in the company was Lennox, who had once been John Earl Gowrie’s brother-in-law, but his wife (Lady Sophia) had died eight years before, and Lennox had married twice since her death. We then have Sir Hugh Herries whose father used to be a friend of Mary, Queen of Scots. Another noble accompanying the royal hunt was Captain David Murray who does not appear to have been

³³ Rev. James Scott, *Life & Death of the Earl of Gowrie* (Edinburgh: Balfour and Clarice, 1818).

inside Gowrie House on the fatal day, and took no part in the assassination. The remaining nobles were Sir John Ramsay and Sir Thomas Erskine. We therefore have six noble figures in the hunting company, apart from servants and pages, which would total at least a company of seventy and probably more.

As James prepared for his hunt, he was approached by Alexander Ruthven, who told him in the strictest of confidence the following tale: While he was walking the previous evening “about the fields, taking the air solitaire alone, with out the town of St. Johnston, where his present dwelling with the Lord his brother was, and there, by accident affirmed to have reencountered a base-like fellow unknown to him, with a cloak, cast about his mouth; whom, as he enquired his name and what his errand was to be passing in so solitary a part, being from all walks. The fellow became on a sudden so amazed, his tongue so faltered in his mouth, that upon his suspicious behaviour, he began more narrowly to look unto him, and examine him, and perceiving that there appeared something to be hid under his cloak, he did cast by the lappet of it, and so finds a great wide pot to be under his arm, all full of coined gold in great pieces, assuring his Majesty, that it was in very great quantity.”³⁴

It is quite evident, that from the beginning of the official theory, for it was not factual as will be seen, the stranger Alexander is suspected to have met, was fabricated upon James’s own characteristic: King James, when he talked or eat, had a fault with his tongue, to which Sir Anthony Welldon gives us a description of James’s faulty tongue, which is interesting to add: “His beard was very thin, his tongue too large for his mouth, which ever made him speak full in the mouth, and made him drink very uncomely, as if eating his drink, which came out into the cup of each side of his mouth.”

Returning to Alexander’s supposed story, while this stranger (dressed incognito) seemed improbable, it was not impossible he existed at the time. Nevertheless, this story is only told by James, so we only have the royal word of what Alexander allegedly said. In continuation, Alexander supposedly told James that he took the stranger to “a privy derved house,” locking the doors behind him, without telling anybody (not even his brother John) with one aim to find James and tell him about the matter. We are not told how Alexander had the stranger follow him to Gowrie House, nor under what pretenses this was done. This is a gap in the story that will not be the only one.

³⁴ Official Discourse printed in 1600.

James, “beginning to suspect, that it had been some foreign gold brought home by some Jesuit or practicing Papists, (therewith to stir up some new sedition, as they have oftentimes done before), ³⁵ inquired what kind of coin it was and what a fellow he was that carried it.” Alexander noted (always according to James) “so far as he could take leisure to see them, that they seemed to be foreign strokes of coin, and although the fellow, both by his language and fashions, seemed to be a Scots fellow, yet he could never remember that he had seen him before.” James, being detoured from his hunt, told young Alexander “he would consider of the matter, and, at the end of his chase, give him a resolute answer, what order he would take therein.”

And so King, Courtiers, and servants haste toward “where the game was.” A little before noon, James and his company of nobles (including servants) decide to follow Alexander to Gowrie House in Perth. At the same time, Alexander dispatches Andrew Henderson (chamberlain) to advise his brother John that the King would arrive. Duff (author) had found evidence that John Earl Gowrie was attending a marriage on August 5, 1600, when he was allegedly notified by Henderson that the King was arriving at the house; hence John was dining at the time of the royal arrival, which we are told was about 1:00 p.m. This information has never been contradicted, nor been interlaced within the official theory.

“About dinner-time, word was brought to the Earl who was attending a marriage between a young man of the name of Lamb, and a young woman called Bell, the daughter of a respectable citizen of Perth, that the King and a company with him had come to his house; on which the Earl’s countenance changed, and he appeared to be a good deal perplexed. Being asked by the bride’s father what ailed him, he said he was distressed for a dinner to the King and his retinue, who had come upon him unexpectedly. Mr. Bell urged him to accept of the dinner that was prepared for the wedding, and it is believed he did accept of it.

Samuel Cowan ³⁶

To further corroborate, at least that John was not expecting a royal visit that day, the government’s theory tells us how upon James’s arrival at Gowrie House, he “called for a

³⁵ It was necessary the official theory have some slander against the Catholics.

³⁶ Samuel Cowan, *Gowrie Conspiracy* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, Ltd., 1902).

drink, and was annoyed at having to wait long for it, including the delay of an hour before dinner was served.” So there is a peculiarity here, how this vital information has not been added as an after supplement into the official document.

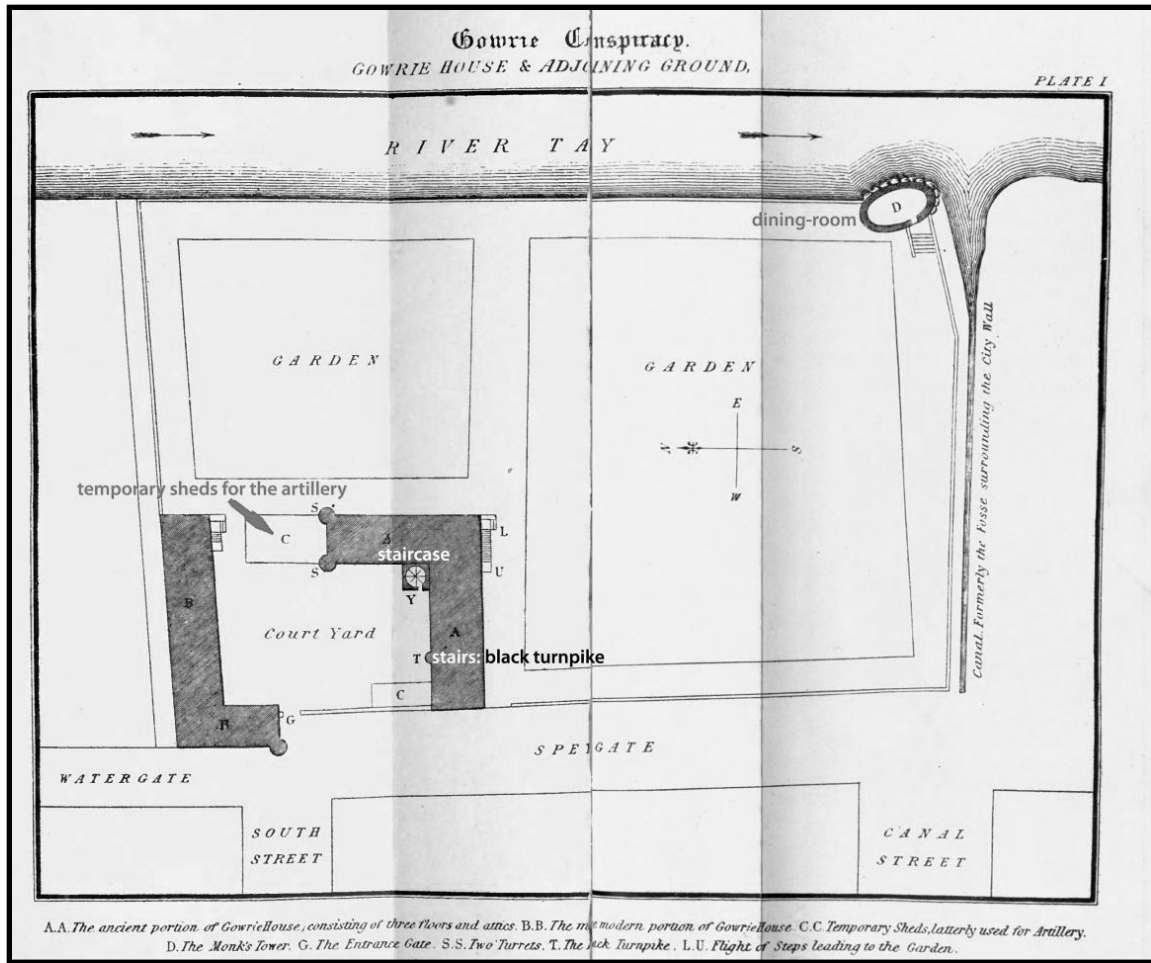
During the interval for the preparation of dinner, Alexander sent for the key of the room leading to the gallery chamber, which adjoined where the King dined. At the end of this apartment was another chamber which led (by stairs) into a circular room formed in the interior of a turret, and this room could be entered by the door at the end of the gallery, and also by another door communicating with a back stair.

Lunch finished, James requested from Alexander to see the man and the pot of gold. After some delay in drinks (an hour) Alexander was willing to show James the mysterious man with his pot of gold coins. James announced no one follow them.

Accompanied only by Alexander, which is highly improbable, James is led “up a turnpike and through three or four chambers,” with Alexander locking the doors behind them; “and then with a more smiling countenance than he had all the day before, ever saying, he had him [the stranger] sure and safe enough kept, until at last, his Majesty passing through three or four sundry houses, [chambers,] and all the doors locked behind him, entered into a little study, where he saw standing with an abased countenance, not a bondman, but a freeman, with a dagger at his girdle.”

According to James, there was no pot of gold waiting for him; what was waiting comes only from his lips, and that is, no sooner had he entered the “little study,” Alexander locked the door behind them, “and at that instant changing his countenance, putting his hat on his head, and drawing the dagger from that other man’s girdle, held the point of it to the King’s breast, avowing now that the King behooved to be in his will, and used as he list [wished] swearing many bloody oaths, that if the King cried one word, or opened a window to look out, that dagger should presently go to his heart.”

Apparently, while this happened, the stranger stood “trembling.” It has never been sorted out either from James’s *Discourse* or from writers, who in the favourable notions was this stranger. Some say he was no other but Henderson the chamberlain, but without supportive evidence. To this day, nobody for sure knows who he was, where his pot of gold coins went, or if he and the pot ever existed outside of James’s imagination.



Pitcairn diagrams, *Antiquarian Proceedings*.

Under such a moment, James promises Alexander, that if he would “spare his life” he would not tell anyone of the matter or what occurred in that “little study;” nor would he “suffer him to incur any harm or punishment for the same.” Alexander in return informs James he will be safe, but he needs to go get his brother (unknown why) and addressed the stranger: “I make you here the King’s keeper, till I come back again, and see that you keep him upon your own peril.” Turning to James: “You must content yourself to have this man now for your keeper, till my coming back.” With these words, Alexander leaves, locking the door behind him.

We would want to fly back and land on one of those walls when James at that moment turns to the stranger to witness the King’s imaginary situation. He asks the stranger how deeply involved he was in this conspiracy, “whose answer, with a trembling and astonished

voice and behaviour was, that as the Lord should judge him, he was never made acquainted with that purpose, but that he was put in there per force, and the door locked upon him, a little space before his Majesty's coming." The stranger went further to state how he was ever trembling, requesting Alexander for "God's sake, and with many other attestations, not to meddle with his Majesty, nor to do him any harm. But because Alexander had, before his going forth, made the King swear he should not cry nor open any window, his Majesty commanded the said fellow to open the window on his right hand, which he reactively did."

From the King's story, it seems Alexander made up the tail -told earlier- about the pot of gold coins in order to be lured to the Gowrie House. The motive given by the government was to assassinate his Majesty. If this is so, it is peculiar how one part of the tail was apparently experienced and not the other: Why create two subjects into the luring story (the stranger and the pot of gold coins) and only offer one subject, with the most lucrative being removed if the King was to be assassinated? Why lure him to the "little study" in the busy town of Perth, at their own house, when the opposite would have been profitable, by taking James to their country residence (Ruthven Castle) in the neighbourhood of Perth as opposed to their town residence (Gowrie House).

There is no doubt, that if James had been assassinated, it would have ruined the Gowrie family, because the King had openly gone into Gowrie House, and that family would have been accountable for the King's protection.

In the meantime, James's Courtiers just finishing their lunch (John with them) witness one of the servants telling them James had ridden off. Ruffs, doublets, knives, swords, and boots scurry outside. The stable master (Thomas Cranstoun) was questioned if he had seen the King ride away, who replied he had not. But we are told that John thought Cranstoun was lying; we are not given the reason why John thought his stable master was lying, but assured the royal company he would find out what was going on, and ran toward the house only to return seconds later to tell them that James had indeed left. "Whereat they rushed together out at the gate, and made towards the Inch,³⁷ crying all for their horses; passing all as it was the providence of God under one of the windows of the study wherein his Majesty was."

One would need to ask if anyone had searched or inquired where James's horse was. If the horse was missing, James was missing; if the horse was there, James was there. We find

³⁷ This was the Inch of Perth, where the famous clan battle of thirty men had been fought centuries ago.

no record in James's *Discourse* if anyone inquired to search for the royal horse. We believe this is another hole/gap in the story, and it definitely triggers peculiarity.

Since truth never suffers by investigation and/or research, we continue.

Whilst the company was outside, Alexander went back up to the "little study," and resolved to assassinate James. This is a peculiar flow of events, to lure James upstairs, lock the door, leave James in a stranger's company (who was trembling with fear), lock the door, come back without locking the door again, and then before killing James to bind his hands, so that when James manages to free himself, he hurls himself at Alexander toward the window in a struggle.

We are not told what the stranger did at that point; it is as though James totally forgot about this man's presence in the room and could or would not give the readers any further information on him after this moment. This is the third hole/gap in the story.

The company downstairs, going over the events (John still amongst them) they suddenly hear James's voice cry out. Lennox says to Marr, "The King calls, be he where he will." They all glance up at the house, and see (says Lennox), "his Majesty looking out at the window, hatless, his face red, and a hand gripping his face and mouth," James screeching at the top of his lungs, "I am murdered. Treason! My Lord of Marr, help, help!" Marr corroborates the others on this, as they all see James vanish from the window; "and in his judgment, his Majesty was pulled, perforce, in at the same window."

Erskine immediately seizes John: "Traitor, thou shalt die! This is thy work," while Lennox and Marr rush up the great staircase to the hall but find the door locked. John Ramsay (the King's page) runs swiftly up the back stair to the top, pushes open the door of the Round Chamber with his foot and sees the King and Alexander wrestling; James fights off Alexander; both struggle out of the "little study" onto the landing. According to Ramsay, the King had Alexander's head under his arm; the latter "almost upon his knees," had his hand on the King's face and mouth. "Strike him low," cried James to Ramsay, "because he wears a secret pyne doublet," which was an under coat of defense, made of wire, to shield from the point of a dagger, usually worn by pions or foot soldiers.

George Nicolson, who we met earlier, wrote to Cecil on August 11, 1600, that Alexander wore a silk cut doublet without armour, with or without weapon he did not seem to know. In addition, John Earl Gowrie was without arms, save two rapiers, which he had to borrow. "The

matter is believed to be otherwise than the King reports it;" Nicolson writes. "All parts of the country, so far as I can learn, are in great suspicion at the King's attitude."

George Nicolson to Sir Robert Cecil

(August 11, 1600) ³⁸

Anent this tragedy, I have certified it in effect as the King caused it to be written; but notwithstanding, there has arisen great doubts of the truth thereof, which increase so exceedingly as unless the King take some of the conspirators and give them out of his hands to the town and Ministers (to be tried and examined) for the confessing and clearing of themselves and the people, on the scaffold or at their execution, a hard and dangerous impression of the King and his dealings in this matter will enter and remain in the hearts of the people and of great ones how far so ever they may have carried it to the King.

It is begun to be noted that the reports coming from the King differ, that the man [the stranger] who should have been in the turret chamber said so; ³⁹ and yet was there without heart or hand and had many names. No such man was taken or known or judged to be, till Saturday, when the King sending to take him he was thereupon slain. The King was angry because he was not saved; that Thomas Cranston wounded and in danger of death should make and subscribe a declaration clearing the Earl [John] and his brother; [Alexander;] and that the master should be without armour in a silk cut doublet to the shirt, some say without weapon and others with his dagger in its sheath undrawn so found when slain.

The Earl [John Ruthven] hearing of the stir and death of his brother, ran and got a weapon and he and Thomas Cranston (his servant) following were encountered and set upon by Sir Thomas Erskine with his two attendants, Wilson and Murray, and with the recently made Knights, Sir John Ramsay and Sir Hugh Harris, Sir Thomas Erskine being leader, and John Earl Gowrie slain by Sir Thomas and found as his brother was without any armour save a rapier or two with him.

There are many other circumstances as that John Earl Gowrie had almost nobody with him, which the people have among them. The matter is believed to be otherwise than the King reports it.

³⁸ Samuel Cowan, *Gowrie Conspiracy* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, Ltd., 1902).

³⁹ It was later revealed that the stranger turned out to be the chamberlain, William Henderson.

The Ministers were ordered to intimate the matter to the people. I hear as yet they have got no further in the pulpits than that if John Earl Gowrie and his brother attempted such a treasonable purpose, they had their death worthily, and it merited the rooting out of their race, but if it were otherwise it was a token of a great judgment over the land. However, they were glad and praised God that the King was safe, and desired God to reveal the truth, saying that from that place they were to say no more till they had good warrant of the certainty, and much more to this effect very warily going no further.

All parts of the country so far as I can hear are in great suspicion at the King's attitude. Mr. Thomas Cranston is brought in a litter to Falkland where Mr. Wm. Rhind, the Earl's pedagogue and secretary, are prisoners. They deny any such intention on the part of John Earl Gowrie or his brother yet it is thought the King shall force [torture] from them the truth of what they know.

The Ministers banished by the King were: Ro. Bruce; Walter Balcanquill; William Watson; Jo. Hall; and, James Balfour.

* * *

Going back the Gowrie House top landing, Ramsay threw down the King's falcon he was holding, drew his dagger (or *couteau de chasse*) and struck Alexander in the face and neck. Alexander was then thrown down the stairs by the shoulders "who was no sooner shot out at the door, but he was met by Sir Thomas Erskine and Dr. Harris [King's physician] who there, upon the stair, ended him." James set his foot on the falcon's leash, and so held the animal from flying. This is another improbability: No animal, especially a hawk, would remain tamed under all this turmoil. The hawk would have flown prior to James's foot go for the leash.

If this was not enough, the Courtiers of James bustle him into an adjoining chamber; apparently, John saw his brother dead and arrived with a rapier in each hand, and rushed along the gallery followed by seven of his servants with drawn swords. John attacked Erskine and three companions, who were all wounded, "but they fought with determined energy." At that moment, someone called out that the King was slain, and John, as if paralyzed with the news, dropped his weapon, when Ramsay who noticed this, "slew him instantly with his sword."

After all was over, the King knelt in company with his nobles and thanked God for their deliverance. At the trial, ten days later, it was mentioned if Alexander could have been wounded instead of being killed. On this, James answered: “Man, I had neither God nor the Devil before me, but my own defense.”

Before the event, but unknown when, private orders were sent by “James to Captain David Murray (Controller of his Household), with a message to his cousin, the Earl of Tullibardine, ordering him at midday to come on August 5th to the South Gate of Perth with 300 horsemen in arms.”⁴⁰ When Tullibardine arrived, he helped James flee the scene through the garden to the summerhouse that went down by steps to the river. There the King and his company slipped into some small boats, were carried to the South Inch of Perth, where Tullibardine and his party received them, and escorted them to Falkland leaving behind the people of Perth battering at the great gate, “and threatened to blow them all up with powder if the King would not send them out Ruthven (their Provost) alive.”⁴¹

We believe the concept for the Gunpowder Plot, five years later (again on a fifth day of a month) was born from the words of the people of Perth battering at the great gate “and threatened to blow them all up with powder.”

On November 1, 1600, Parliament declared judgment to be that the late John and his brother Alexander to be convicted of high treason as having attempted the King’s death. Their names, memories and dignities be cancelled and deleted from the books of the nobility. Their estates and property be confiscated by the King. Their dead bodies to be carried on Monday, November 19, 1600, to the public Cross of Edinburgh, there hanged, drawn, and quartered in presence of all the town, and their heads, quarters, and carcasses to be fixed to the most public places of Edinburgh, Perth, Dundee and Stirling.

Two younger brothers of the family (William and Patrick) were at Dirleton when Alexander and John were killed at Perth. When the King got to Falkland he dispatched Murray and issued a proclamation for the apprehension of the two remaining brothers under the pretense “that they might not survive the misfortune of their family, and perhaps be the avengers of it.” One of the King’s servants named Kennedy, who had formerly been servant to John Earl Gowrie, on hearing this, stole a horse from the King’s stable, arrived before Murray, and both boys fled, but only William managed to go abroad, and was received by

⁴⁰ Samuel Cowan, *Ruthven Family Papers* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd., 1912).

⁴¹ Ibid.,

Theodore Bèza. The other brother, Patrick, was captured in June 1603 and kept in the Tower for nineteen years.⁴²

In 1616, a grant of £382 per annum was made to Patrick Ruthven by the authorities. It is supposed that at this date his brother William was dead, as nothing more was heard of him, and that Patrick would now be the head of the Ruthven family, which would give him a claim for compassionate consideration at the hands of the now King James of England.

In 1622, Patrick was ordered by James to be removed from the Tower to Cambridge, and awarded a pension of £500 per annum out of the Exchequer. In 1624, he was released from custody but was not allowed to live near the Court, and he fixed his domicile in Somersetshire. Very little is known of him for at least sixteen years, when in the reign of Charles I, in 1640, he was resident in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and there is an entry of his assigning £120 per annum to his daughter, Mary Ruthven, who was married to the famous painter Sir Anthony van Dyck.

Patrick Ruthven was buried at St. Georges in Southwark as Lord Ruthven, on May 24, 1652. "When Patrick died at 68, he was found inheritor and representative of some of the noblest blood in Scotland, a cousin of the King and a possible claimant of the throne, being a tenant of a cell in the King's Bench."⁴³

Superstition was excited by the deaths of John and Alexander. Calderwood (antiquarian) relates that the Sabbath day after their death, which fell on August 10th, the most appalling apparitions were seen at that house. "The windows of the room where the tragedy took place were flung violently open, flashings of fire were seen, and armed men leaned out of the windows weeping and wringing their hands, and the most doleful moaning and shrieking resounded for nights throughout the house, such as thrilled the hearers with horror."⁴⁴

Four theories have appeared as the motive to the death of John and Alexander:-

The above theory from James himself stands first being it is the official one.

The second theory was how this was a plot concocted between Queen Elizabeth and the Gowries, for seizing James to deliver him to her, that he might be wholly under her control; and that Alexander invited James to his house at Perth on August 5, 1600, for this purpose.

⁴² Samuel Cowan, *Gowrie Conspiracy* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, Ltd., 1902).

⁴³ John Bruce, *Stepney Cowell Papers*.

⁴⁴ Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, Vol. V., 1854.

This theory would be unlikely for the simple reason and fact that about six years before Elizabeth's death, James had opened a secret correspondence with Cecil to guarantee his smooth entrance into England and sit upon the English throne when Elizabeth died. Cecil would not have allowed the Gowries or any family to jeopardize these plans.

The third theory is only connected with evidence by a tie, slight as a silver ribbon, according to Court gossip: James himself contrived the plot to kill the brothers in order to revenge his jealous suspicions against Alexander and his Queen; ⁴⁵ yet, as the sister of the hero of the tale was concerned throughout the whole of the fantastic trifling with the silver ribbon, there is no reason to fix any stigma on the Queen, or on anyone else.

The fourth theory agrees with the official theory that the brothers wanted to assassinate James. Some say the motive was money because James owed John and Alexander a large sum as noted earlier.

The account of the murders was also told in the *Aulicus Coquinariæ* (1651) attached to the pamphlet that discredited Sir Anthony Welldon's *Character of King James* in the same year. "The most remarkable was that of Gowrie's conspiracy in Scotland. And I never read or heard (till our pamphlet) that Sir George Humes his gravity and wisdom ushered him into the secrets of the King (therefore) and chiefly to make good that story. The name of Gowrie in Scotland was not notorious, until 1568, when Gowrie, amongst other confederates, in those divided times of trouble, laboured much for the imprisoning Queen Mary, mother of King James." ⁴⁶

The actual motive of what happened that day must remain a mystery, but since motive is rarely unselfish, it is now unanimously admitted by historians, that the motive was James's jealousy and the wealth the Gowries had. Osborne tells us how no Scotchman you could meet beyond sea "but did laugh at the version of that day coming from James's *Discourse*, and the politicians said the relation in print did murder all possibility of credit. But I will not wade farther in this business, not knowing how dangerous the bottom may prove, being by all men's relations foul and bloody, having nothing to palliate it but jealousy on the one side, and fear of the other." ⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Pinkerton, *Life of the Earl of Gowry*.

⁴⁶ The author is inaccurate. William, fourth Lord Ruthven, could not be concerned in imprisoning Queen Mary for having fled for his deep participation in the murder of David Rizzio, since he died at Berwick in 1566.

⁴⁷ Osborne's *Traditional Memoirs*.

Sir Henry Neville in a letter to Winwood (November 15, 1600) writes “out of Scotland it was heard there is no good agreement between the King of Scots and his wife, and many are of opinion, that the discovery of some affection between her and the Ruthven brother [Alexander] was the truest cause and motive of all that tragedy.” ⁴⁸

If Alexander wanted to assassinate the King he had a sufficient opportunity of doing so when he got him into the turret chamber, which he locked behind him. The youngster knew James’s company (seventy or more) were downstairs and time was of an essence; however, we are told that after James was threatened by the youth, the latter left him with a stranger as his keeper, then unlocked the door, and left the turret chamber. “For Ruthven to leave the turret chamber at so critical a moment was ridiculous if he decoyed the King there in order to assassinate him,” Cowan (author) well noted. ⁴⁹ Furthermore, the stranger vanishes; the pot of gold coins vanishes; and most importantly, two young lives are cut short due to James, regardless if he concocted or not to kill the boys.

George Nicolson writes a letter dated October 28, 1600, to Cecil: “Here is a whispering that a book should be printed in England contradicting the King’s narrative of the Gowrie Conspiracy.” ⁵⁰ And the Master of Gray to Cecil on October 31, 1600, writes: “As for Gowrie’s death, it is very strange for the Duke (Lennox) says, he was there, and yet if he were on oath he could not say whether the deed proceeded from Gowrie or the King.” ⁵¹

Under the presidency of the Lord Chancellor, the trial for the Gowrie murders met at Falkland on August 9th four days after the event. A second trial was held on August 20th presided over by the Lord Chancellor. Among the witnesses examined were the Duke of Lennox; Earl of Marr; Andrew Henderson; the Abbot of Inchaffray; the Abbot of Lindores; Sir Thomas Erskine; Sir John Ramsay; John Graham of Orchil; John Graham of Balgowan; Andrew Roy; Bailie of Perth; George Hay; and, the Prior of the Charter House.

All men were supporters of James’s theory, and it is not difficult to see what would be the scope of their evidence.

Between the death of John and Alexander, and the meeting of the Town Council, the execution of three confidential friends to that family was underway: Sir Thomas Cranston, George Craigenvelt and John MacDuff. The executions were authorized by James; the

⁴⁸ Winwood’s *Memorials of Affairs of State in the Reigns of Elizabeth and King James I.*, Vol. I., p. 274. (1725).

⁴⁹ Samuel Cowan, *Gowrie Conspiracy* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, Ltd., 1902).

⁵⁰ Ibid.,

⁵¹ Ibid.,

condemned emitted depositions before their death showing that they fought on the side of John Earl Gowrie but avoided all mention of the King.

“The servants of Gowrie gave their evidence as it was under threat of torture or under actual torture, the boot and the lokman been brought from Falkland for this purpose; and that no evidence favourable to the Gowries would be accepted. The relentless procedure of the King suggests the suspicion that he was at least anxious to utilize to the utmost a favourable opportunity to get rid of his debts, [owed to the Gowries,] not merely by the confiscation of their estates, but by placing the whole family under the ban of the law.”

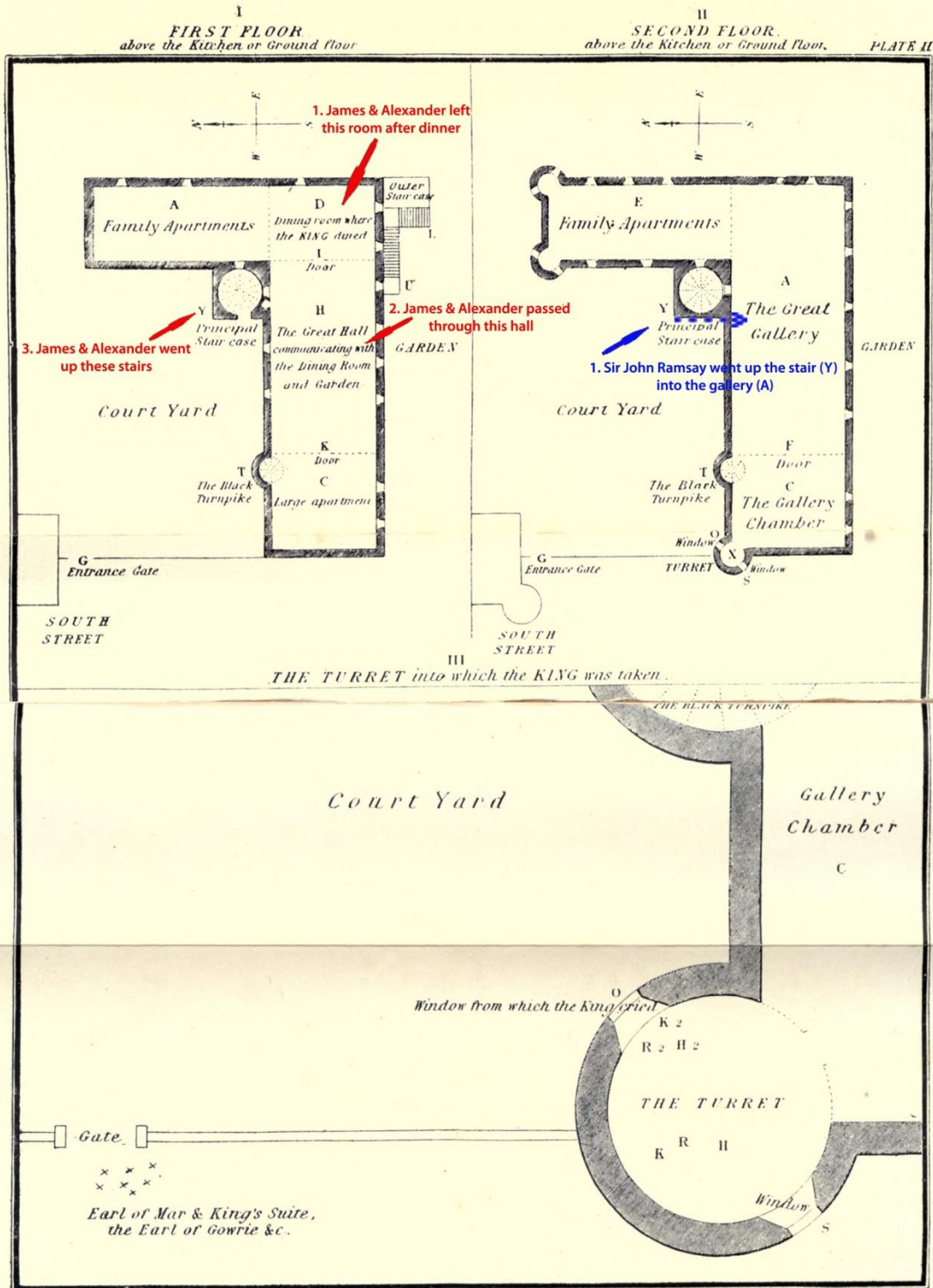
Sir Sidney Lee ⁵²

“This mysterious story never has been satisfactorily accounted for or cleared up and probably never will be.”

John Bruce (Stepney Cowell Papers)

⁵² (a) Sir Sidney Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. L. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897); (b) Arnot's *Criminal Trials*.

Gowrie Conspiracy



K, R, H, Position of the King, the Master of Ruthven and Andrew Henderson, on their entrance into the Turret & at the commencement of the Struggle
K 2, R 2, H 2, Their relative Situations, at the time the King cried for help.